



ACHIM SZEPANSKI 2023-10-23

WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS CIRCULATE LIKE OIL AND CAPITAL – DELEUZE AND BAUDRILLARD ON THE FARCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

NECROPOLITICS BAUDRILLARD, CAPITAL, DELEUZE, HUMAN RIGHTS, UNIVERSAL

In ABC, Deleuze says: “Listen, this respect for the ‘rights of man’ – it really makes me want to make almost abhorrent statements. It belongs so much to the weak thinking of the empty intellectual period we were talking about earlier. It is purely abstract these ‘rights of man’. What are they? They are purely abstract, completely empty.” f

In their book “What is Philosophy?”, Deleuze/Guattari refer to human rights as “universals” and “axioms” that very hypocritically “claim to restore the society of friends or even of sages by forming a universal opinion as a ‘consensus’ capable of moralizing nations, the state, and the

market.” In reality, however, human rights are only “empty abstractions belonging to the minds of imbeciles.” Human rights, and especially their declarations, are, as Deleuze notes, “never made in dependence on the people who are directly concerned.” Therefore, not only do they usually neglect the people they are supposed to protect and give voice to, but they are also complicit in the politics of domination by capital. Thus, human rights are compromised by generating “human misery” according to the desires of global capitalism, without taking into account the needs of the so-called subject and its protection.

Deleuze sums up: “One might think one was in a Marquis de Sade story. Colonized and poor people go through the worst ordeals that man does to them, and when they get to safety, it is nature that interferes.” For Deleuze, when one speaks of ‘the rights of man,’ it is only an intellectual discourse for vile intellectuals. For intellectuals who have no ideas. Deleuze has also noticed that these declarations are never made by the people who are directly affected.

If there were a successful representation of human rights, then unique cases would have to be treated in their particularity, and attempts would have to be made to find innovative solutions that reflect and express the particular problem they face. But exactly the opposite is the case. Human rights thinking is so deeply rooted in “eternal values” and fixed norms that are far removed from real life that they completely overlook the particularities of each case. Thus, it happens that the needs of certain people in a very specific situation are compromised according to the norms of static values that come “from above,” completely disconnected from the concrete needs of life. Ultimately, rights are reduced to empty generalities that form a consensus, which in turn transforms concrete and unique singularities into mere abstractions.

Already Marx or Burke attacked the emptiness and abstraction of rights. What makes Deleuze’s critique of rights unique, however, is his reference to the problem of “transcendence” and the way transcendence relates to what he sees as the problem of a thinking that dominates human rights. As Deleuze notes, human rights are perceived as “eternal values,” and as such they introduce “new forms of transcendence.” This view is consistent with Deleuze’s Nietzschean reading and his understanding of morality as transcendent, dictating and shaping our way of life through its eternal values, but in reality these values conceal an insidious “hatred of life.”

Deleuze’s immanence calls for a different ethics, as opposed to morality, which – despite a post-religious or even secular language – bears theological traits. Human rights have now become a kind of “secular theology.” Thus, Deleuze opposes the notion of morality as a transcendent value – a notion that prescribes “what is good and what is evil,” something that is detached from life and acts as a judge who passes judgment based on the “commandments” of eternal values. This notion of transcendent human rights and their moral, eternal values has the effect of limiting all new possibilities for ethical living, experimenting, and creating. In his second book on Spinoza, Deleuze explains that transcendent values and morality are all these things “that turn against life.” He continues by pointing out that it is morality and transcendence that “poison life through categories of good and evil, of guilt and merit, of sin and redemption.” Human rights are the opiate of a secular theology. And it gets worse. Depending on the situation and the urgency, genocide becomes a Western guiding principle.

Ultimately, all of this has led us to just blindly follow the values, rules, and norms that come “from above” without even examining whether and why we need to follow such a transcendent moral code. According to this logic, whoever or whatever refuses to follow the rules is called an opponent of progress, even evil or inhuman, and must therefore be fought and eradicated. Human rights are thus elevated to a divine status that supposedly contains the one, objective truth. In this way, blind faith in rights and their values reduces us to vengeful spirits of resentment, completely divorced from life, and places us in a perpetually judgmental mode of being and thinking.

In an interview about the work of Michel Foucault, Deleuze explains that both are concerned with “establishing different ways of existing, depending on how one folds the line of forces, or inventing ways of living that also depend on death, on our relations to death: to exist not as a subject but as a work of art.”

However, on the question of ethics, one must also consider the following: fairness today is the correlate of the “ethics-as-politics” paradigm. Why? Because fairness assumes that we should have the same kind of relationship with everyone. But there is nothing in this world that can encourage us to be universally fair or to act according to a mutual support of everyone's interests. Rather, we live in a world where everyone distrusts everyone else – we have a structurally determined interest in being mean to others and successful at the expense of others. Fairness as it exists today is the fairness of neoliberal competition; a state that proclaims itself to be a natural state.

Thus, for Deleuze, our “lack of experimentation” has led us into a nihilistic stalemate. Only through a radical reassessment of our transcendent, eternal values do we have the possibility – to paraphrase Antonin Artaud – of suspending the judgment of our (secular) God(s).

For Baudrillard, the nihilism of today is that of an “over-lit” world in which the light of reason has penetrated every dark corner. Yet there is a sense in which light cannot help but cast shadows, and Baudrillard insists on the continuity of nothingness under the total realization of the world, the attempt to transform everything into something. Like seduction, which is necessary for the functioning of simulation, nothingness is necessary for the transfinite systems of meaning. Nothingness, as Baudrillard says, is the background against which things stand out, and it is necessary for any coherent meaning. The persistence of nothingness, however, is more than a mere survival of contemporary nihilism, but points to the possibility of completing and overcoming nihilism. The more transfinite systems expand, the more nothingness remains (in both negative and positive senses, as quantifier and noun). This suggests the possibility of reaching a state where nihilism is complete in the sense that there is truly nothing left; both in the sense that transfinite systems have fully expanded and in the sense that all value has been extinguished and there is only nothingness. To draw an analogy with Nietzsche, this would be the point at which complete nihilism is reached because the highest values have devalued themselves.

One can read the Afropessimist Calvin Warren along these lines. For him, the goal of black nihilism is to expose the unbridgeable gap between being and function for blackness. The enigma of blackness is that it functions in an anti-black world without being-just as “nothingness” functions philosophically without our metaphysical understanding of being. The

metaphysics is obsessed with both blackness and nothingness, and the two become synonyms for that which breaks through metaphysical organization and form. The Negro is black because the Negro must perform the function of nothingness in a metaphysical world. The world needs this work. However, this obsession also turns into hatred because nothingness is incorrigible – it shatters the ontological foundation and certainty. Nothingness frightens metaphysics, and metaphysics tries to master it by transforming nothingness into an object of knowledge, into something it can master, analyze, calculate, and schematize. Finally, it is about the absurdity that any law could ever change the formulation of black existence as nonexistence. Any restorative right we can imagine would destroy the political community. Black rights would be the end of human rights.

Baudrillard gets more specific than Deleuze, noting a fallacious analogy between notions of the universal and the global. While human rights, freedom and democracy could be attributed to the universal values of the Western Enlightenment, globalization is characterized by techniques, market, tourism, finance, information. Baudrillard sees Western universality on the wane, while globalization is apparently irreversible. Any culture that tried to universalize would lose its singularity and would inevitably die, Baudrillard diagnoses. He states that universalization, which in the Enlightenment still presented itself as a discourse of progress, today takes place as an endless proliferation of values, including their neutralization. He writes: "The same happens, among others, to human rights, to democracy; their expansion corresponds to their weakest definition, their maximum entropy." Human rights, democracy, and freedom circulate globally today in an entropic mode. Human rights end up like undead humans implanted with industrial gadgets and surviving as posthuman horror clowns. Humans and their living labor were once a promise, but the process of machinization has not necessarily made them more intelligent (for otherwise the question of machine rights would arise). In the end, the spectacle of human rights is purely a product of simulation machines. The phantasm of human rights, the last crutch of a perfect program of life, is the effect of machines accompanied by people who elevate life to a fetish in order to destroy it unquestioningly elsewhere.

Baudrillard seems torn; on the one hand, he states the suspension of Western guiding values or even their demise in globalization, which in turn has only universalized exchange and capital, on the other hand, he speaks of the entropic and at the same time endless circulation of universal values in the capitalist mode. Baudrillard writes: "First, the market globalizes, the promiscuity of all exchange and products, the continued flow of money. Culturally, this means the promiscuity of all signs, of all values, that is, pornography ... At the end of this process, there is no longer any difference between the global and the universal, the universal is itself globalized, democracy and human rights circulate just like any other global product, like oil or capital." The fact that Baudrillard seems to be undecided and does not consistently take the second position may be related to the fact that he subliminally equates modernity, technoculture, and capital/capitalism. Following this equation, postmodernism then has to be regarded as a special cultural formation or as a phase of capitalism, which is optionally described as information capitalism, consumer society, cognitive or simulative or cybernetic capitalism.

As long as universal values still had some legitimacy, singularities could be integrated into a

system as differences. Baudrillard discovered the mantra of difference philosophy, even before Laruelle launched his all-out attack on it, in consumption. In this regard, Baudrillard writes: "Crucial, however, is this compulsion to relativity insofar as it forms the frame of reference for a never-ending differential positioning." But this is now over in the course of globalization: "...now, however, they (values) no longer succeed, since triumphant globalization makes tabula rasa with all differences and values by bringing in a completely indifferent culture or unculture." Baudrillard remains conceptually imprecise here as well, but certainly recognizes a tendency. Randy Martin has shown in his book *Empire of Indifference* that indifference and endless circulation belong together and that today even the asymmetrical, small wars circulate in the global network. Even more, the corresponding interventions revolve around the possibility to circulate, as opposed to the possibility to proclaim sovereignty. For Martin, this is a shift similar to that from the shareholder who holds the shares of a company to that of the trader of derivatives who creates wealth by managing risk. The unintended consequence of this risk management, which Martin sees at work in both global financialization and U.S. empire, is to simply exacerbate the volatility of what it entails. This results in a diabolical cycle of destabilization and derivative wars, a characterization Martin calls the "Empire of Indifference." This empire, he argues, is no longer characterized by progress or development, but promises its occupants only the management of a perpetual presence of risk possibilities. In the totalitarian, i.e. indifferent, view of neoliberalism, there is finally only capital, including human capital. Consequently, current neoliberal policies intend and multiply the constant modulation of economic risk for the individual and the statistical sorting of the population, namely into those who are successful in the face of risk and those who are definitely not – and nothing else means to be "at-risk". And accordingly, neoliberal governance tends to move from the closed institution to the digital network, from the institution to the process, from command to (repressive) self-organization. Although it contains a political program, neoliberalism is anti-social; even more, the anti-social is the *modus operandi* of the neoliberal state, and this also means indifference as part of its public grimace. Populations of risk involve governance as the governmentality of indifference. Governance, however, does not simply overlook the hedging of interests against interests, but tests the possibility of the population to produce interests, and to do so in the name of speculative capital accumulation. This kind of risk management implies the universal circulation of monetary capital and with it that of values, human rights, and democracy. The circulation in turn corresponds to the digital networking or the screen of the global as a one-dimensional universe. A zone of indifference is formed between the imagination (of images) and reality. In this zone, violence circulates in the images, the violence of the images, and the violence through the images, and in their interplay they permanently caricature human rights, which ultimately can hardly be separated from a cultivated violence. Under the guise of humanity, a policy is pursued, especially in the media, that is purely out for effects. When it comes to the exhibition of the pure, the clean and the good, there is no longer any reason for the politician to hold back: the bad guys, they are always the others.

Baudrillard again states a tendency here: capitalization and its corresponding digital networks emerge a soft annihilation, a communicative and genetic violence that processes virally and is bent on totalitarian consensus. Whether or not Baudrillard's theory of the viral is appropriate here, it is nevertheless true that this kind of violence seeks to exclude any

negativity and singularity. Even more, and this again calls into question the notion of homogenization and that of indifference: comprehensive inclusion today can also take place via divergence or disjunction. Disjunction is a pure relation, a movement of reciprocal and at the same time asymmetrical implications that express difference as such. And difference is communication, infection, or virulence through heterogeneity, where the interconnectedness here is that different sides communicate with each other in such a way that there is no unity, fusion, or synthesis. Inclusive disjunction means putting foreign elements into communication without the need for a unified logic. One must think pessimistically about connectivity today. Deleuze speaks of communication as a commercial professional training, of marketing and the transformation of philosophy into advertising slogans. He counters this with voids of non-communication that can escape both the circuit of communication and control and the diffusion of differences through inclusion. Within the system of inclusion, difference is a means by which power and capital seek to perpetuate their domination. The effects of this temporal modulation are events, a set of unverifiable stories, unverifiable statistics, and untenable justifications. The accelerating speed makes network media like the Internet a bubbling soup for conspiracies and insinuations, insofar as the sheer volume of participants and the incredible speed of accumulation of information means that by the time one conspiratorial theory is laid to rest, new material for many more conspiracy theories has long since begun to circulate. Everything circulates. The panoptic view of the sovereign is today complemented and extended by calculation and the management of risk, with agents circulating as information shadows. Total control of the information shadows is achieved through algorithmic containment. Risk management is a constitutive part of the circulation of money capital and with its global circulation everything else begins to circulate, democracy and human rights included.

François Laruelle speaks at this point of universal capital instead of capital, not in the sense of a historical-social formation, but of a universal “logic” to which all economic, social and political phenomena are subordinated. The monetary profit production of capital today includes a general surplus production that extracts the surplus money value not only from labor, but from communication, from the speed and from the urgency of change. And capital even generates the surplus through the production of knowledge, images, marketing and slogans. It may extract it from democracy and from human rights. This universal capital works more persistently than any formation historically found so far on the seizure of the surplus, it is more active and pursues, sorts and directs people more intensively than any previous form of control, it acts softer and at the same time more insidiously than all previous forms of frontal attack, yet remains perverse like any form of espionage and accusation and at the same time shows itself less brutal than open annihilation, less ritualized than the inquisition – or, to put it briefly: “universal capital” proceeds softly and dispersively, instantaneously and viciously. It is pure chicanery.

We can conclude that capital always needs its philosophical and political legitimation. And so it circulates not only money, credit, and itself as capital, but also its legitimating discourses, down to the most general values, human rights and democracy. As such circulating signs, however, universal values are, and in this Baudrillard is right, neutralized and differentiated at the same time, emptied of any meaning. Indeed, their expansion corresponds to the weakest definition, their maximum entropy.

translated by deepL.

← PREVIOUS NEXT →

META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER